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TAGS: [PREL](#) [UNSC](#) [KPAL](#) [ET](#) [ER](#) [MOPS](#)
SUBJECT: ERITREAN PERMREP: WHAT FUEL PROBLEM?

REF: ASMARA 00086

Classified By: Ambassador Alejandro Wolff for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: USUN D/POL Counselor met with Eritrean PermRep Desta February 21 in advance of Security Council session consultations on UNMEE to discuss Eritrea's rationale for blocking UNMEE's access to fuel (UNSC session reported septel). Desta described the fuel crisis as a technical issue and accused the Secretariat and the Security Council of allowing Ethiopia to distract them from the issue of border demarcation. USUN D/POL Counselor replied that Eritrea's blockade of UNMEE and refusal to engage on the issue had made discussion of broader issues, including border demarcation, impossible. Desta mentioned that the Eritrean Permanent Mission was facilitating the travel of a high-level UN official to Asmara to discuss the fuel issue, but did not provide any further information. END SUMMARY.

Desta: Fuel issue
Is Technical

12. (C) Eritrean PermRep Araya Desta told D/POL Counselor and Poloff on February 21 that the Security Council was inexplicably focusing on a fuel shortage instead of defending the "rule of law," i.e. the 2002 decision of the Ethiopia Eritrea Border Commission (EEBC). Desta argued that the fundamental issue is border demarcation and the withdrawal of the Ethiopian forces from the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ). Rather than pushing for demarcation, the UNSC, the U.S. and the UN Secretariat had focused, he said, on the "technical issue" of fuel supplies to UNMEE. USUN D/POL Counselor replied that Eritrea's decision to prevent UNMEE from obtaining fuel had effectively changed the focus of the international community from a substantive discussion of the border and normalization of Ethiopia-Eritrean relations to the fuel crisis and the unacceptable situation this created for UNMEE. If the issue was indeed technical from Eritrea's perspective, the Government of Eritrea should work on resolving it immediately with the relevant UN officials.

13. (C) Desta replied with a list of accusations against the UN and UNMEE. He complained that the UN technical assessment team, which was tasked with resolving the fuel crisis with the Eritreans, chose to visit Addis Ababa before Asmara - "Why did they go to Addis first? To get their instructions from Prime Minister Meles?" (NOTE: Subsequently, Desta mentioned that the Eritrean Permanent Mission was facilitating the travel of a high-level UN official to Asmara

to discuss the fuel issue. He did not provide any further information. END NOTE.) Likewise, Eritrea had refused to allow UNMEE to import fuel from UNMIS supply lines because he claimed UN peacekeepers were involved in the black market, people trafficking and other illegal activities.

Eritrea Not Interested in
UNMEE Weapons or Equipment

14. (C) Desta complained that UNMEE was not consulting properly with Eritrean authorities on efforts to consolidate the UN forces in Asmara and Assab. D/POL Counselor responded that U.S. and other concerned countries wanted Eritrea, at a minimum, to allow the forces to withdraw in a safe and dignified fashion with their equipment (reftel). Desta protested that UNMEE's decision to withdraw was unwarranted, but said Eritrea had no plans to seize UNMEE's equipment or weaponry. He would not commit Eritrea to facilitating the redeployment of UNMEE troops, reiterating only that the withdrawal was an irrational response to an Eritrean-wide shortage. He claimed fuel would be replenished if UNMEE would only return to work.

KHALILZAD